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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 OTTAWA 000109

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SUBJECT: CANADA'S "NEW" CHINA STRATEGY EMPHASIZES INCREASED
HIGH LEVEL CONTACTS

Classified By: PolMinCouns Scott Bellard, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: The Canadian government recently rolled out a "new" China strategy that will emphasize more high level ministerial visits and dialogue. Prime Minister Harper has yet to visit Beijing during his three year tenure, but may later in 2009. Canada's engagement with China seeks first to promote commercial interests, but has human rights and democracy as important ancillaries. Canada's human rights dialogue with China remains suspended, and Canadian diplomats would welcome the chance to hear how the U.S. manages its own bilateral human rights dialogue, as well as to pursue informal but regular consultations with the U.S. (and perhaps Australia) on China policy. End summary.

Economics Driving Canadian Policy

12. (C) In mid-January, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) North Asia Director General Phil Calvert began briefing inter-agency colleagues to raise awareness of a new Canadian strategy on China that will emphasize more high level bilateral contacts, according to DFAIT China Division Deputy Director Carole St. Louis and desk officer Ala Ji. Ji confirmed that the Cabinet of Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper had approved the new strategy paper in late December. St. Louis underscored that Canada's broad strategic objectives regarding China will remain fundamentally the same, and that Canada will continue to seek to &maximize economic opportunities& and &effectively pursue long-term interests& in China while &promoting Canadian values on human rights and democracy.&

She commented, however, that &economic issues are the engine for our relations with China.& Ji added that Canada recognized clearly that China is a &key driver with impacts& on economics and finance, geopolitical security, environmental concerns, and social issues. St. Louis summarized that Canadian strategy focuses on three main goals:

- increasing Canadian prosperity;
- ensuring that China is a &good global citizen;& and,
- working with China to address environmental challenges, climate change, health and product safety, and population movements.

Human Rights Dialogue Stalled

13. (C/NF) St. Louis said that Canada will pursue &structured partnerships& where Sino-Canadian interests converge, while nonetheless maintaining a &respectful and firm& approach where they clash. She added that Canada intends to keep its policy of &firm and frank dialogue& in areas where the two countries disagree, most notably in human rights and

democracy. She lamented, however, that China had suspended its human rights dialogue with Canada in 2006 after Parliament conferred honorary citizenship upon the Dalai Lama; PM Harper then welcomed him to Ottawa in October 2007. The dialogue remains in suspense. &It is much easier to talk about human rights when you already have a strong relationship,8 St. Louis observed. Canada has taken special note of Australia's re-oriented approach to China over the past decade, according to St. Louis, and will seek to emulate it as Canada re-engages with China. Both St. Louis and Ji expressed an interest in hearing more about U.S. experiences about our own human rights dialogue with Beijing. Qabout our own human rights dialogue with Beijing.

14. (C) St. Louis added that, even absent resumption of a formal bilateral human rights dialogue with China, Canada will seek to integrate discussions of human rights as a component of other dialogues, including on the environment, energy, legal issues, nuclear energy and safety, and health. St. Louis cited as an example that Canada would highlight the importance of civil and political rights and of access to legal aid during the bilateral dialogue on legal issues. Canada's tactic will remain focused on the technical nature of the issue at hand, without referring specifically to "human rights issues." She added that Canada does talk explicitly about human rights in specific cases (such as March 2008 statements by the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister on the violence in Tibet), as well as on the margins of APEC, G-8, and G-20 meetings. Canada took the floor at the UN Human Rights Council on February 9 and also submitted written questions -- notably about the death penalty, re-education through labor, charges of "endangering state security," and trafficking in persons -- for the ongoing

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Universal Periodical Review on China at the UN Human Rights Council.

High Level Visits To Pave Way Forward

15. (C) Canada will seek to implement its new strategy by developing an integrated "results-oriented and whole-of-government approach to priority issues," according to St. Louis. In the recent past, she noted that senior civil servants at several non-foreign affairs agencies had often been reluctant to engage with China for fear of offending anti-Communist elements of the ruling Conservative Party. An explicit objective of the new strategy paper is to signal throughout the government that PM Harper and his party do strongly endorse greater engagement with China.

16. (C) St. Louis added that Canada sought to use &results-based, two-way ministerial visits and dialogue8 to build momentum for an eventual prime ministerial visit to China. Neither St. Louis nor Ji could point to any preliminary planning for a visit to China by PM Harper, however; he has never visited since taking office in 2006 (then-Foreign Minister Emerson did attend the 2008 Beijing Olympics). St. Louis speculated that the prime minister might visit before or after the Singapore APEC leaders' meeting in November. Even without a prime ministerial visit, St. Louis emphasized the increasing tempo of recent bilateral exchanges. She noted that the head of Canada's Public Service Commission will soon visit China for talks with counterparts. International Trade Minister Stockwell Day will visit several cities in China in April. Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon also plans to visit China this year but has not set specific dates.

17. (C) At the sub-cabinet level, Canada is also trying to increase the level of official contacts. DFAIT Deputy Minister Len Edwards will welcome a Chinese vice foreign minister to Ottawa later in February for a dialogue on political and security matters, although Ji admitted that the two sides had yet to set an agenda. Canada will send a ship to China for the Chinese Navy's sixtieth anniversary

celebrations this year. A Canadian experts-level delegation traveled to Beijing in January for general policy discussions on Afghanistan-related political and developmental assistance issues. St. Louis added that Canada plans to invite China's Afghanistan experts to Ottawa during 2009 to continue these discussions.

Potential Pitfalls: Dalai Lama and Uighurs

18. (C/NF) St. Louis expressed optimism about the direction of Sino-Canadian relations. She noted that renewed pressures from refugee groups for Canada to offer to relocate Uighur detainees at Guantanamo have the potential to put the bilateral relationship on an unhelpful path. She explained that Canadian law insulates the refugee application process completely from political considerations, and that the Canadian public would expect decisions on these and other refugee cases solely on their merits. If these cases do move forward successfully (and if the U.S. requests Canada's consideration), Canadian law enforcement and intelligence agencies would likely seek close coordination with U.S. counterparts, according to St. Louis. She also cited some concern about new damage to bilateral ties from the Dalai Lama's expected September visit to Montreal, but noted that he was unlikely to meet on this trip with PM Harper.

Global Partnership Opportunity

19. (C) St. Louis and Ji both expressed appreciation for DG Calvert's visit to Washington in October to discuss China policy with State interlocutors, and commented that DFAIT would be interested in instituting informal but regular bilateral or trilateral meetings (perhaps including Australia) to discuss China, especially regarding human rights and security issues. St. Louis promised to explore the possibility of inviting a U.S. delegation to Ottawa in September or October.

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